

Vale View Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118494
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	326837
Inspection dates	30 June –1 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Carole Skinner

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	244
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lisa Easterby
Headteacher	Steven Norfield
Date of previous school inspection	12 July 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Vale View Road Elmsvale Dover CT17 9NP
Telephone number	01304 202821
Fax number	01304 202821

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This average-sized primary school draws its pupils mainly from the town of Dover. Most of the pupils are White British. Over the last three years, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest group being Gypsy Romany pupils. At the time of this inspection, just over one pupil in ten was at an early stage of learning to speak English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average in most year groups. The headteacher was appointed in January 2008, the deputy headteacher in April 2008. There has been a very high turnover of staff, including senior leaders, during the past three years. The school also has a very high proportion of pupils joining and leaving the school at various stages during the year. The school makes provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage in the Nursery and one Reception class.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school. It is improving at a good pace under the leadership of a determined headteacher with high aspirations for the school and its pupils. After a period of significant upheaval and staffing difficulties prior to his appointment, he has successfully created a strong staff team, many of whom are new. Rigorous evaluation of the school's performance has led to carefully planned actions and initiatives to raise standards and accelerate pupils' progress. The impact of this work is now beginning to be seen, especially in reading and science. However, senior leaders are under no illusions about how much remains to be done, particularly in developing pupils' writing and mathematical skills. Overall, leadership and management are satisfactory, rather than good, because there are still key areas where the impact of their work has yet to be seen, for example in raising the attainment of the more able pupils. Nevertheless, the improvements made during the last year are evidence of the school's good capacity for continuing improvement.

One of the main successes has been a marked increase in the proportion of good teaching. This is helping to accelerate pupils' progress. As a result, pupils' achievement is satisfactory in relation to their often very low starting points. Although standards in Year 6 remain below average, the school has halted the downward trend. Test results are often skewed by the high proportions of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are at an early stage of learning to speak English. Good support for these pupils enables them to make progress in line with their peers. New and improved systems for tracking pupils' progress highlight those who are not making enough progress from term to term. Teachers and senior leaders then put additional support in place to meet their needs. The tracking procedures are still being developed and do not yet include pupils' targets or show whether their current levels of attainment are high enough in relation to their starting points.

Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage because they experience a rich variety of activities that develop all aspects of their learning at a good rate. This good practice continues into Year 1 to provide a seamless transition for the many pupils who still need to learn through play and exploration. Excellent teaching of letters and sounds in Reception lays a solid foundation for future learning and is already leading to higher standards in reading and writing in Years 1 and 2. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall because good quality teaching is not yet consistent enough throughout the school. Teaching quality is variable in Years 1 to 6, ranging from satisfactory to good with outstanding elements. The most effective lessons often involve pupils in active learning that engages and interests them. Enjoyment levels dip when pupils are too passive and this is when some pupils become distracted and disrupt learning for others. Occasionally, the most able pupils are not provided with sufficiently challenging work. The curriculum is being remodelled to enable teachers to make more meaningful and relevant links between subjects so that all learning is challenging and engaging for all groups of pupils. This work is at a relatively early stage of development.

Senior leaders have rightly focused on improving pupils' behaviour, their attitudes to learning and their well-being in order to support good learning. Effective partnerships with parents and external agencies have contributed to raising attendance levels and improving behaviour. Good arrangements for promoting pupils' health, welfare and safety help them to feel secure, to eat healthy food and to take plenty of exercise. Pupils have good opportunities to play an active part in the day-to-day running of the school and in the local community.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good teaching and an exciting range of activities are key factors in the children's good progress. Both the Nursery and Reception classrooms are colourful, inviting and well equipped and each has an extensive outside area that provides activities across all areas of learning. Children learn well through play and exploration that encompasses all aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. Outstanding teaching of early reading and writing skills in Reception ensures that most children have a good grasp of letters and sounds by the time they enter Year 1. Standards have risen significantly as result of this effective teaching and, although still below the national average, children have achieved well by the time they enter Year 1, especially in communication, language and literacy where standards are very low on entry. Children develop confidence and independence, learning to select activities and make choices. Adults take great care to keep children safe and help them to enjoy learning. They pay good attention to hygiene and make sure that children drink plenty of water and eat fruit and vegetables. Adults support children's learning by playing alongside them, asking questions and discussing what they are doing. On occasions, there are missed opportunities to extend the children's knowledge and understanding to higher levels because adults do not have a clear enough understanding of the intended learning outcomes for different activities.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and accelerate pupils' progress, particularly in writing and mathematics.
- Improve the quality of teaching to that of the best, particularly in providing sufficient challenge for the most able and ensuring that pupils are actively engaged in their own learning.
- Refine the procedures for tracking individual pupils' progress to enable staff to evaluate whether pupils are on course to reach suitably challenging targets in relation to their starting points.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory although standards are below average overall. Standards are beginning to rise again after a significant two-year decline when many pupils underachieved as a result of the difficulties caused by the high staff turnover and changes of leadership. Although improved on last year, standards remain below average in Year 6, largely because just over half of the pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities or are at an early stage of learning to speak English. New strategies for teaching sounds and letters are already having a marked impact on standards in reading. Greater emphasis on learning through investigative approaches has had a similar effect in science. Although pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are showing signs of improvement, for many they are still limited by weak language and communication skills, and in writing and mathematics, standards remain a relative weakness. Lack of challenge for the more able pupils in lessons means that they do not always reach high enough standards in writing, mathematics and science.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school, but the disruptive behaviour of a small minority gives cause for concern to some pupils and parents. A strong emphasis on promoting pupils' moral and social development is helping them to form good relationships with adults and each other, based on mutual trust and respect. The large number of pupils who join the school during the course of each year quickly make friends who help them to settle in. The school recognises there is further scope for extending pupils' spiritual awareness and their appreciation of cultural diversity. Pupils play an increasingly influential role in the everyday life of the school. Older pupils take seriously their responsibilities as house captains, play leaders and 'buddies' to the younger children. The school council represents pupils' views and suggests good ideas for improving the school. Pupils take part in a number of community events, such as the Dover Olympic 2012 activities, and raise funds for local charities. Pupils' literacy, numeracy and computer skills prepare them satisfactorily for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

There is much good teaching but it is not yet consistent enough in all year groups and subjects to ensure that pupils make good progress throughout the school. This is partly because new initiatives and strategies have not yet had enough time to become fully embedded in everyday practice. In some lessons, tasks are not matched carefully enough to pupils' needs and interests and the more able pupils are not always given work that challenges and extends them. Pupils thoroughly enjoy lessons when they are actively engaged in practical activities that interest them. Behaviour is also better in these lessons. There are occasions when lessons fail to engage pupils sufficiently because they have to sit and listen to the teacher for too long, or are given tasks that are too easy or too difficult. Well planned support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those learning to speak English helps them to make at least satisfactory and sometimes good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is a work in progress. It meets all statutory requirements and includes effective programmes to promote pupils' personal, social and health education. It is enriched by a good variety of clubs, themed weeks, visits and visitors. The school is in the early stages of planning a more creative curriculum around themes that develop pupils' skills across a range of subjects. Currently, there are too few opportunities for pupils to use and develop literacy, numeracy and computer skills in other subjects. Achievement in mathematics is limited because pupils, particularly the more able, have insufficient opportunities to use and apply their mathematical knowledge and skills in investigation and problem-solving. A good range of intervention programmes meets the needs of pupils who are underachieving in particular aspects of learning. Effective links with local schools enhance the provision for gifted and talented pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pastoral care and support are good. The pupils' well-being is uppermost in the school's list of priorities. Close collaboration with external advisers and specialists ensures good support for pupils and their families, especially those who are new to the school or who have particular needs, such as non-English speakers. The family liaison officer plays a key role in working with families and involving them in their children's education. The pupil mentor provides a 'listening ear' for pupils who need to talk and also supports pupils at risk of exclusion through disruptive behaviour. Academic guidance is satisfactory. There are inconsistencies in marking. While some just praises pupils for effort, the best examples highlight good features of pupils' work and offer clear guidance on the next steps needed to reach a higher level of attainment. Pupils are sometimes involved productively in assessing their own and each other's work but this is not always done consistently well. Systems for tracking individual pupils' progress are currently underdeveloped, and do not always enable staff to check on whether pupils are making sufficient progress towards challenging targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Strong teamwork and a shared vision for the future of the school are key factors in the school's recent improvement. The leadership team has only been in place for nine months but it has already put systems and procedures in place that are driving improvements in key areas, such as the teaching of reading and writing. These have not yet been implemented for long enough for their full impact to be evident in pupils' achievement. An extensive programme of training and professional development for the largely new staff has been instrumental in improving the quality of teaching and learning. The headteacher has successfully capitalised on the expertise of staff to develop leadership skills across the curriculum, some of which are still at a relatively early stage of development. Governance is satisfactory. There has been a high turnover of governors since the last inspection and many are still familiarising themselves with their role and responsibilities. The headteacher keeps them well informed, for instance about how to interpret performance data. As a result, governors are becoming more confident to challenge and question. The school has made a good start in promoting community cohesion through initiatives such as the 'Community Fruit and Veg Scheme' and the Family Club. It holds coffee mornings to introduce families recently arrived from Eastern Europe to other members of the community. It is beginning to develop links beyond Dover and the recent culture week, 'Around the world in eight classes', gave pupils the opportunity to learn about different ways of life.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

2 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Vale View Community School, Dover CT17 9NP

We enjoyed our visit to your school and would like to thank you for helping us and for talking to us about your work. We were pleased to hear that you feel safe and that you get plenty of exercise, drink water during the day and eat fruit and vegetables. You do a lot of things to help your school run smoothly each day and the school council comes up with good ideas for making improvements.

The staff have made a lot of improvements over the last year and your school is now giving you a satisfactory education. Many of you are making faster progress than you were a year ago, especially in reading and science, and you are reaching higher standards. But you are not doing quite so well in writing and mathematics and the teachers know that you can do better. They are starting to change the way different subjects are taught to make your lessons more interesting. You told us that you enjoy your lessons when you have plenty to do but not when you have to sit still and listen to the teacher for too long.

- We have asked your teachers to plan more exciting and interesting ways of learning about different subjects so that:
- you all make faster progress, especially in writing and mathematics
- you are always given work that challenges you and makes you think
- you are often given practical things to do so that you enjoy learning even more.

We have also asked the teachers to make sure they give you challenging targets to reach and then check regularly that you are still on track to achieve them. This is to ensure that you make good progress from when you start school to when you leave.

You can help by working hard in every lesson, remembering your targets and using them to help you with your work.

With best wishes for your success in the future

Yours faithfully

Carole Skinner

Lead inspector